

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application. Please amend claims 28, 46, and 60 as follows:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1.-27. (Canceled)

28. (Currently Amended) A deck system comprising:

a plurality of boards operable to extend across a plurality of laterally spaced joists, each of said boards presenting an upper lip and a lower lip, said upper and lower lips defining a pair of longitudinally extending grooves on generally opposite sides of the board, ~~and~~ said lower lip having a thickness “E”; and

a plurality of generally T-shaped fasteners each operable to rigidly couple to the joists, each of said fasteners presenting a generally solid base including a lower joist-engaging surface for engaging the joists and a pair of protrusions each having a bottom surface that is spaced vertically upward from and substantially parallel to the joist-engaging surface, height “F”; said bases presenting waist portions defining generally uniform gaps between said boards, each of the protrusions extending generally perpendicularly from a vertical axis of the fastener, each of said protrusions further operable to be received in a respective groove of a respective board in a substantially complementary fashion, wherein ~~“F” is the an~~ average vertical distance from the base to the protrusions ~~“F”~~ is defined between the joist-engaging surface and at least a portion of the bottom surface of the protrusion, wherein said at least a portion of the bottom surface of the protrusion is closer to the waist portion than to the distal end of the protrusion and “E” is at least 1% greater than “F[.]” along said at least a portion of the bottom surface of the protrusion, such that the joist and the at least a portion of the bottom surface of the protrusion cooperatively exert a compressive

force on the lower lip when the joist-engaging surface engages the joist and the protrusion is received in a respective groove of a respective board in a substantially complementary fashion.

29. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 28, wherein "E" is at least about 2% greater than "F."

30. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 29, wherein "E" is at least about 5% greater than "F."

31. (Previously Presented) The deck system of claim 28, wherein the protrusions exert a downward holding force on the lower lips when the protrusions are at least partially received within the grooves.

32. (Previously Presented) The deck system of claim 31, wherein the downward holding force is due to the thickness of the lower lips being at least 1% greater than the height of the protrusions.

33. (Previously Presented) The deck system of claim 31, wherein the downward holding force inhibits upward movement of the boards relative to the fasteners and joists.

34. (Previously Presented) The deck system of claim 31, wherein the fasteners are comprised of a resilient material that allows the protrusions to be elastically flexed when the protrusions are at least partially received within the grooves.

35. (Previously Presented) The deck system of claim 34, wherein the flexing of the protrusions facilitates maintaining the downward holding force on the lower lips.

36. (Previously Presented) The deck system of claim 28, wherein the fasteners securely couple the boards to the joists when the protrusions are at least partially received within the grooves.

37.-45. (Canceled)

46. (Currently Amended) A method of coupling a plurality of boards to a plurality of support members, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) rigidly attaching a first generally T-shaped fastener to a first support member, the first fastener having a base including a lower support member engaging surface engaging the support member and at least one protrusion, the protrusion extending generally perpendicularly from a vertical axis of the fastener and presenting a bottom surface that is substantially parallel to the lower support member engaging surface;
- (b) positioning a first board across the first support member and against the rigidly-attached first fastener such that the protrusion of the first fastener is at least partially received in a first longitudinal groove of the first board to form a mating relationship between the first board and the first fastener, wherein the positioning of the first board and the first fastener in the mating relationship causes the protrusion of the first fastener to flex and exert a first downward holding force on the first board, wherein -
the longitudinal groove is generally defined by an upper lip and a lower lip,
the first holding force is exerted against the lower lip by at least a portion of the protrusion that is closer to the vertical axis of the fastener than to the distal end of the protrusion, and
the vertical thickness of the lower lip is at least 1% greater than the average vertical distance from the support member engaging surface of the base to the bottom surface of the protrusion at said at least a portion of the protrusion;
- (c) positioning a second fastener against the first board such that a protrusion of the second fastener is at least partially received in a second longitudinal groove of the first board to form a mating relationship between the first board and the second fastener;

- (d) rigidly attaching the second fastener to the first support member while maintaining the mating relationship between the first board and the first and second fasteners, the second fastener being rigidly attached to the first support member after the second fastener is positioned against the first board; and
- (e) positioning a second board across the first support member and against the second fastener to thereby form a mating relationship between the second board and the second fastener, the second fastener being disposed generally between the first and second boards and causing a generally uniform gap to be maintained between the first and second boards.

47. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein the first holding force inhibits movement of the first board relative to the first fastener and the first support member.

48. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein the first holding force holds the first board against the first support member.

49. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein rigidly attaching the second fastener to the first support member causes the protrusion of the second fastener to flex and exert a second downward holding force on the first board.

50. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 49, wherein the first and second holding forces are exerted on generally opposite sides of the first board.

51. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 49, wherein the first and second holding forces hold the first board against the first support member.

52. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 49, wherein the first and second holding forces securely couple the first board to the first support member.

53.-54. (Canceled)

55. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein the thickness of the lower lip is at least 2% greater than the average vertical distance from the base to the protrusion.

56. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 55, wherein the thickness of the lower lip is at least 5% greater than the average vertical distance from the base to the protrusion.

57.-59. (Canceled)

60. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[57]]~~ 49, wherein the holding force inhibits movement of the boards relative to one another, movement of the support members relative to one another, and movement of the boards relative to the support members, thereby forming a more rigid deck system than if the holding force were not present.

61. (Canceled)

62. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 28, wherein the fasteners are operable to be rigidly coupled with the joists utilizing a fastening element and the gap between two of the boards is greater than the maximum lateral dimension of the fastening element.